Appendix V: Algonquian Third Person Pronouns

Besides the vowel system restructuring and the change to the 1pl.EXCL.CONJ suffix, one other potential, but tenuous, shared innovation or diffusion among the Western Algonquian languages would be the creation of new independent/emphatic third person pronouns (Proulx 2004a, n.d.:38-42); the innovation/diffusion would in this case probably include Blackfoot. The Western languages reflect the following pronominal system, where the forms have the shape of irregularly possessed forms of a stem *-i·raw- (with regular contraction of underlying *|awe|, loss of word-final consonants, and similar changes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First (EXCL)</strong></td>
<td>*ni·ra =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First INCL</strong></td>
<td>— — — —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second</strong></td>
<td>*ki-ra =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third</strong></td>
<td>*wi·ra =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eastern Algonquian languages reflect the same first and second person pronouns, but entirely different third person pronouns, Proto-Eastern Algonquian (PEA) *nēkəma (sg.) and *nēkəmāwa (pl.). The traditional view is that the Western languages reflect the original Proto-Algonquian (PA) situation, while PEA has innovated new third person pronouns, but this view faces certain difficulties. For one thing, no one has a good explanation for the origin of PEA *nēkəma from any known PA elements, so if it is an innovation, its source is obscure. More significantly, the third person forms traditionally reconstructed for PA could very, very easily be derived analogically from an older system which lacked them, based on the existing first and second person pronouns and on the pronominal inflections of verbs and possessed nouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“1”</td>
<td>*n-  : *ni-ra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“2”</td>
<td>*k-  : *ki-ra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“3”</td>
<td>*w-  : X = *wi-ra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proposed analogy is of course extremely obvious, and even if it’s a “shared” innovation of the Western Algonquian languages it’s entirely conceivable that it happened more than once in different languages or clusters of languages.

LeSourd (2003) has pointed to instances of wìl and emphatic wíla (both as though from *wi·ra) attested in late 19th-century Passamaquoddy, though there are only four examples, so they were clearly rare synonyms of the more usual nēkom even at the time. LeSourd argues that this demonstrates that *wi·ra can indeed be reconstructed back to PA, but this does not follow; again, the analogy involved is simple and obvious enough that we should not be at all surprised if speakers of Passamaquoddy made it independently. A third person pronoun shaped like *wi·ra being found in a single Eastern language provides no evidence on what the PA third person pronoun was. Furthermore, as LeSourd briefly concedes (2003:369) and as Proulx (2004a:169)
makes a point of, this requires us to assume that Passamaquoddy (and its ancestors all the way back to PEA) retained two different third person pronouns side-by-side for at least 1,500-2,000 years or so — and that the pronoun which all the other descendants of Passamaquoddy’s ancestors eventually settled on was the one that didn’t match the rest of the pronominal paradigm.

Proulx proposes one possible explanation for the appearance of wil/wíla in the Passamaquoddy of the turn of the 20th century: influence from Innu (2004a:169-171). The Wabanaki peoples—the Mi’kmaq, Maliseets, Passamaquoddies, and Abenakis—had extensive contacts with Innu speakers, particularly during the fur trade period, and sometimes spent long periods of time in Innu territory. The Innu third person pronoun is uin, which in Western Innu (spoken in the southernmost communities of Pessamit and Mashteuiatsh) is pronounced /wil/. It’s therefore possible that Passamaquoddy speakers acquired this pronoun from Innu speakers in the 1800s where it remained for a period as a rare synonym of nēkom, but then dropped out of use again as contacts with Innu speakers declined.[1] An alternative possibility is simply that some Passamaquoddy speakers took the very natural analogical step and created wil/wíla on the model of first person singular nil/níla etc., but that again these new pronouns only lasted for a short period. Either way, we don’t need to assume an unbroken descent from PA.

Other than this, there are no traces whatsoever of a putative PA *wi·ra, *wi·rawa· in Eastern Algonquian. We are therefore left with two main possible scenarios:

1. The Proto-Algonquian third person pronoun was *ne·kema· or so, which survived unchanged in the Eastern languages. In all non-Eastern language it was entirely replaced by the straightforward analogical form *wi·ra, or by verbs in Arapahoan and Cheyenne.

2. The Proto-Algonquian third person pronoun was *wi·ra, forming a coherent paradigm with the other personal pronouns. This survived unchanged, other than a few replacements, in all languages except Eastern Algonquian, which innovated a new pronoun *nēkama of unknown origin.

(Of course, it’s also possible that both forms are innovations.) The comparative Algonic evidence is a little ambiguous on certain points here, but does make clear that *wi·ra cannot be reconstructed back to Proto-Algonic. Yurok (1sg nek, 2sg kel-, 3sg k’elaš or expressed with demonstratives) suggests that only PA *ki·ra can be traced back to Proto-Algonic but that the first person pronoun may also have begun in **n- and that this formed the nucleus around which later analogies created *ni·ra and perhaps *wi·ra in PA. On the other hand, Wiyot doesn’t seem to reflect an initial **n- in the first person pronoun, but otherwise it somewhat more closely resembles the Algonquian paradigm, with the pronouns appearing almost like the possessed forms of a root |-il-: 1sg yil, 2sg k’il, 3sg k’iláʔl. Although here only k’- is the appropriate possessive prefix,

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1 I’m taking Proulx at his word here about the historical situation among Algonquian speakers in the region, since I don’t know the details myself. I do note that Proulx makes this claim about lots of contact between various Wabanaki peoples and Innus, but then only gives examples of Mi’kmaq-Innu contacts (his specialty being Mi’kmaq), rather than, you know, Passamaquoddy-Innu contacts, which would be far more relevant to his actual argument. So . . . I dunno . . .
noteworthy is what appears to be the “obviative” suffix -əʔl in the third person form, implying descent from some sort of earlier possessed form. (Yurok -əš in kʷəlaš seems to be an “obviative” suffix in origin as well, and the full Yurok pronoun is probably cognate with Wiyot kʷiláʔl.)

As for this possessed form, while it potentially did not originally exist as an actual root and merely represents the result of multiple stages of analogy (independently in both Algonquian and Wiyot?), at least synchronically in PA it can be analyzed as a dependent root *-i·raw-, possibly with a corresponding Medial *-raw- meaning “body,” as in Ojibwe oshkinawe “young man” (← *weškirawe-wa, with *wešk- “young; raw; fresh”) and Plains Cree kinoyawēw “s/he has a long body” (← *kenwirawe-wa, with *kenw- “long”) (Goddard 2007:218, n. 15).

It’s also worth pointing out how similar the PA pronoun base *-i·raw- is to the noun stem *-i·yaw- “body; self,” possessed forms of which function as reflexive pronouns or replace or merge with the inherited personal pronouns in many languages. It seems pretty likely that at some point one of these influenced the shape of the other, or they mutually influenced one another.

Turning to the origin of the PEA pronouns, while as noted their exact source is unknown, their expected source should presumably be some sort of demonstrative, and so I should point out that they bear a formal similarity to some Algonquian demonstratives. Specifically, if the *-ma/*-mā-portion of *nēkəma/*nēkamāwa is taken to be originally the deictic particle *ma·hi “over (here, there)” (Goddard 2003:56),[2] then what remains, *nēkə-, resembles the PEA distal absentative stem *ənēk- (animate singular *ənākā, roughly “that person (not present)”). There are difficulties in trying to derive the personal pronoun directly from this demonstrative stem, but plausibly it derives from earlier elements that also gave rise to the PEA distal absentative.

Even if this is the case it doesn’t do much to illuminate the relative age of the PEA pronouns, but might provide a small clue. If the *-mā-portion is indeed from a reduced form of *ma·hi, and if the latter is the source of the PA clitic *ma as proposed in footnote two, this would suggest an old pedigree for the personal pronoun, since the pronoun would preserve the underlying long vowel of *ma·hi that was lost when it was grammaticalized as the deictic clitic *ma, which had a short vowel in PA. Had the PEA pronoun been created after the PA period by adding *-ma, this would have resulted in sg. *nēkəma but pl. *nēkamawa, not *nēkamāwa. Since this relies on several unproven assumptions—*ma·hi is the source of the clitic *mā, the PEA pronoun contains a fossilized element cognate with both of these—it’s a weak argument, but counts for something.

Also perhaps speaking slightly in favor of a relatively old origin of the PEA pronoun is that, as just noted, it’s not possible to directly derive it from any PEA or pre-PEA demonstrative stem but it’s

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[2] This deictic seems like the most likely source of the PA clitic *ma/*ma very commonly added to demonstratives throughout the family. Goddard (2003:56) suggests instead that the clitic *ma is etymologically connected to PA *mam- “take (TA/TI),” but while this is possible—he cites a similar grammaticalization pathway in Munsee—it seems far less straightforward and simple than the alternative proposed here, unless there’s something I’m missing. (Entirely possible!)
possible to imagine how it could have developed out of a deictic related to the absentatives of Core Algonquian and PEA, say something like **en-e·-ka·ma-(h), with original stem **en- or **an- and post-inflectional element *-ka meaning something like “elsewhere, other” (Goddard 2018:96-99). The middle *-e·- reflects the absentative ending in all but the ANsg, but would be admittedly hard to explain here, and in some ways easier to explain if the pronoun developed after the PA period.

One final consideration is the form of the pluralizer, which reflects *-wa· in both pronoun sets, Western and Eastern. This was underlying *|-wa-w| in Proto-Algonquian, with regular loss of word-final consonants, but this is unusual because normal possessed nouns (which the pronouns otherwise are, formally) would end in a “peripheral suffix” marking the gender/number/obviation of the possessum, and which would protect the pluralizer from loss of the final consonant. Compare putative *wi·rawa· “they” (= *|we-i·raw-wa-w|) with the possessed noun-slash-reflexive pronoun *wi·yawawa-wi(?) “their body, themselves” (= *|we-i·yaw-wa-w-i], with ANsg *-i). This usage is definitely very archaic, so whichever personal pronoun is an innovation within Algonquian ended up acquiring this archaic inflectional pattern. While this development can be explained no matter which form is the innovation, it seems to me easier to explain if the Western *wi-ra, *wirewa is innovative. These pronouns would be totally analogically created from the start, and their form thus dependent on the forms of the other pronouns in the paradigm, and in the other inflectional paradigms which provided the models for the analogy. In this case, the inherited 2sg and 2pl pronouns were *ki·ra and *ki·rawa· (the latter with an archaic ending), and the pluralizer *|-wa-w|, sometimes in the form *-wa-, pluralizes both second and third persons in many places throughout Algonquian grammar, so the creation of matching 3sg and 3pl *wi·ra and *wirewa-, the latter with the archaically formed plural, would be very easy and natural. By contrast, applying such an archaic plural ending to a pronoun formed after the PA period out of some sort of demonstrative would possible, based on the 2pl and so on, but less likely given the new third person pronoun would not fit neatly into the existing paradigm. (Though another possible explanation of the PEA 3pl pronoun could be that its pluralizer was modeled after/borrowed from that of the older pronoun it replaced, while the two were in competition.)

None of this comes close to being strong evidence one way or another, so I remain agnostic on the question of which of the third person pronouns are older within the family. But I would say what little evidence is available—e.g., *wi·ra could be created very easily by analogy, and we perhaps have evidence of that reoccurring in Passamaquoddy; and some aspects of the PEA pronoun, like the long vowel before the pluralizer, the form of the pluralizer itself, etc., look archaic—tips toward taking *wi·ra, *wirewa as innovations. But even if they are innovations, they’re not particularly strong evidence for a Western subgroup, since their creation could have occurred more than once. (In fact, their form in Blackfoot is somewhat divergent, perhaps pointing to an independent creation there, though it’s also possible to derive them from *wi·ra + REFL *wi·yaw.)

3 I’m not positive how to reconstruct the second vowel here—there are a few different PA outcomes of the sequence *|aw-w| and daughter languages show various restructurings of the pronouns—but the ending is certain. The other possibilities are *wi·yo·wa-wi (with *|aw-wa-w| → *|aw-e-wa-w| → contraction of *awe → *-o-wa-w-) or *wi·ya·wa-wi (with *|aw-wa-w| → loss of first *|w| with compensatory lengthening [or contraction of *aw-e-] → *-a--wa-w-).
Sources Used

(“AL” = Anthropological Linguistics)
(“IJAL” = International Journal of American Linguistics)
(“SCOIL” = Survey of California and Other Indian Languages)
(“UCPL” = University of California Publications in Linguistics)